

CHAPTER FIVE

GEORGE PORTERFIELD GATES DIES, 1918

### George Porterfield Gates Dies, 1918

A dramatic change occurred at the Gates house while Harry Truman was in France. After a lengthy bout with influenza,<sup>1</sup> George P. Gates, 83, died at 7:15 p.m., on June 25, 1918. He died in the house on North Delaware Street where he had raised his family and lived since 1867. The community had lost an important leader. The Independence Examiner reported:

... the activities of Independence have felt the force of the family as it touched the life of the community in its social, religious, educational, political and business aspects. The father [George Washington Gates] had been judge of the county court, the younger son, E.P. Gates, attained the honors of the state judiciary and all the while the business acumen of him whose memory we especially recall, as he lies mutely resting from his labors, was felt and honored by all who knew him.<sup>2</sup>

The funeral took place at the Gates mansion on June 27, 1918, and the body was taken to the family plot at Woodlawn Cemetery in Independence for internment.

Under the dictates of George P. Gates's will, T.B. Wallace (son-in-law and husband of daughter Myra Gates Wallace; not related to David W. Wallace) and E.P. Gates (brother) were appointed executors of his estate. On July 3, the executors filed a petition in court to take possession and manage the real estate of George P. Gates for one year. The petition was

granted by Judge Albert W. Ott on July 8.<sup>2</sup>

On July 11, 1918, three local real estate men filed an appraisal on the real property of George P. Gates. The total value came to \$89,029.11. The appraisal also included \$200 in personal property for the "Family Bible and other books" and "\$500 for Household Kitchen and table furniture in residence."<sup>3</sup>

Yet another petition was filed against the estate in Independence Probate Court on August 12, 1918, by Elizabeth E. Gates. The widow, who claimed that no food was on hand, was granted a household allowance of \$1,000.<sup>5</sup>

The payment of household bills to two creditors was also authorized by the court. The following bill to the Hill Brothers, Dealers in Hardware, Stores, Tin and Graniteware, read:

May 4: 41 1/2 sq. ft. Screen wire  
1/2 pt. black screen paint

June 6: 16 1/2 sq. ft. copper screens  
7 1/2 sq. ft. Black screens

June 11: 24 sq. ft. Trellis wire.<sup>6</sup>

The 1918 purchase of black screens and paint indicates that the black house trim was still in use at this time. The second

bill to the Randall Brothers, Brick Contractors, read:

Resetting grate in Residence -- Del. St. \$8.50.<sup>7</sup>

Shares in the Waggoner-Gates Milling Company were revealed to the court by the company's secretary-treasurer, T.O. Cunningham. He told the court that Gates held 251 shares originally purchased at \$100 per share. The 1918 book value of each share came to \$800. The physical plant was valued at \$150,000, with cash and inventory set at \$650,000.<sup>8</sup>

The location and assessed value of the estate's real estate (other than the Waggoner-Gates Milling Company) was announced in court in November. The property and house at 219 North Delaware Street, including the west 14.18 feet of Lot 1 and all of Lots 2 and 3 in Moore's addition, was valued at \$8,500. Two additional properties on North Delaware Street were also assessed. Both were vacant properties in the McCauley Park addition. The first was the south half of Lot 7 and all of Lot 8 in Block 1 valued at \$1100, while the second consisted of all of Lot 10 and the south 17 feet of Lot 11 in Block 3 and came to \$700. The Gates farm, 77 acres, three and a half miles southwest of Independence square, was assessed at \$325 to \$400 per acre.<sup>9</sup>

Under the dictates of the will which was signed by Gates on June 19, 1916, his partners, son, George Walter Gates, and sons-in-law, William Strother Wells and T.B. Wallace, received his property "both real and personal and mixed and wherever situated to be by them held, managed and disposed of as trustees." The will specifically stated that his business interests included the Waggoner-Gates Milling Company, the Hero Mining Company, and Bank of Independence. Gates cancelled payment of all advancements and gifts to his family and provided that they share equally in his estate which was placed in trust for a period not to exceed 20 years following the death of his wife. The net income from the remainder of his estate, "after paying taxes and the expenses of maintenance," was paid to his widow, who received a one-third share, and to his five children, who received two-fifteenths shares.<sup>10</sup>

The will made no specific provision for the Gates mansion or property at 219 North Delaware. The three trustees, however, were empowered "to sell any or all of my real estate" or

to sell any of the personal estate.... Upon termination of the trust, the trustees shall have the power to sell any or all property necessary to make final distribution among the beneficiaries.<sup>11</sup>

As the trustees were close family members, it is certain that

all three agreed to permit Mrs. Gates and Madge Wallace and her family to continue living in the house.

Final settlement of the estate came in probate court on December 9, 1918. It read as follows:

| Name                         | Real Estate | Personal Property | Total Value             |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Elizabeth Gates (widow)      | \$11,244.13 | (annuity)         | \$11,244.13             |
| George Walter Gates (son)    | \$6260.40   | \$16,986.99       | 23,247.39               |
| Madge Wallace (daughter)     | 6260.40     | 16,986.99         | 23,247.39               |
| Maud Louise Wells (daughter) | 6260.40     | 26,986.99         | 33,247.39               |
| Myra Wallace (daughter)      | 6260.40     | 21,986.99         | 28,247.39               |
| Frank E. Gates (son)         | 6260.40     | 16,986.99         | 23,247.39 <sup>12</sup> |

#### George Porterfield Gates Dies, 1918

<sup>1</sup>Ron Cockrell, "Oral History Interview with Mrs. Margaret Truman Daniel at the Harry S Truman National Historic Site, Independence, Missouri, November 17, 1983" (Omaha: Midwest Regional Office, National Park Service, 1983), p. 10. [Hereinafter cited as Cockrell, "Oral History Interview with Margaret Truman"].

<sup>2</sup>"Closed A Useful Life," Examiner (June 26, 1918), p. 1, folder-Gates, George P., Research Room Vertical File, HSTL.

<sup>3</sup>A Petition, Application of Executors to take possession of Real Estate, Independence Probate Court, filed July 3, 1918, No. 4177, Estate of G.P. Gates, Office of the Probate Court of Jackson County, Independence, Mo.

<sup>4</sup>Oath of Appraisers, July 11, 1918, Joseph Noland, Frank C. Wyatt, and F.W. Weinanshagon, No. 4177, Estate of G.P. Gates, Office of the Probate Court of Jackson County, Independence, Mo.

<sup>5</sup>Application of widow for allowance in lieu of Provisions, Elizabeth E. Gates, Independence Probate Court, filed August 12, 1918, No. 4177, Estate of G.P. Gates, Office of the Probate Court of Jackson County, Independence, Mo.

<sup>6</sup>Bill, Hill Brothers, Independence, Mo., to the Estate of G.P. Gates, July 11, 1918, No. 4177, Office of the Probate Court of Jackson County, Independence, Mo.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., bill, Randall Brothers, October 5, 1918.

<sup>8</sup>Affidavit of Appraiser as to Fees and Disbursements In the Matter of the Transfer Tax on Estate of G.P. Gates, November 8, 1918, T.O. Cunningham, Secretary-Treasurer, Waggoner-Gates Milling Company, No. 4177, Office of the Probate Court of Jackson County, Independence, Mo.

<sup>9</sup>Affidavit of Real Estate Appraiser, November 8, 1918, R.R. Chopin, No. 4177, Estate of G.P. Gates, Office of the Probate Court of Jackson County, Independence, Mo.

<sup>10</sup>Last Will and Testament of George Porterfield Gates, June 19, 1916, No. 4177, Estate of G.P. Gates, Office of the Probate Court of Jackson County, Independence, Mo. In a November 22, 1916, codicil, Gates bequeathed a special legacy of \$15,000 to Maud Louise Wells and \$5,000 to Myra Wallace.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Order Assessing Transfer Tax, Etc., Independence Probate Court, December 9, 1918, No. 4177, Estate of G.P. Gates, Office of the Probate Court of Jackson County, Independence, Mo.